

Hahnemann and Paracelsus.

THE address delivered by Dr. J. H. CLARKE at the opening of the last summer post-graduate course at the London Homœopathic Hospital has been revised and issued as a pamphlet.<sup>1</sup> It represents the advanced and, to many ordinary minds, the mystical section of the various schools of thought that are grouped under the form of medical nonconformity known as homœopathy. The essential tenet propounded by HAHNEMANN 126 years ago was that the cure of disease is to be effected by drugs which will produce in healthy people symptoms similar to those of the disease to be treated ; he said, as PARACELSUS had said more than 200 years before, *similia similibus curentur*. Proving the pudding by the eating, it would be difficult to say, in the present state of allopathic pharmacology, that this is essentially wrong. With a few exceptions the more orthodox drug therapy has foundations which seem scarcely firmer, and in any case the motto of the old *British Journal of Homœopathy*—*in certis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus*—is a good rule of life.

But Dr. CLARKE deals at greater length with two other doctrines which are more likely to be received with incredulity. In the first place he insists with PARACELSUS on the unity of everything, but, while his predecessor would probably have been a good biologist in the twentieth century, Dr. CLARKE believes that plants and minerals are of like passions with ourselves, and is prepared to assign curative properties to them after psychological analysis. It may be wondered whether the analysis really extends to any other minds than those of the good physician and his patient. In the second place he sides definitely with the Hahnemannian purists and holds that drugs can be effective at infinite dilution, and that, after the material particles have been subdivided to the fullest possible extent, there is developed a spiritual curative agency. As it happens the problem of the ultimate possibilities of subdividing matter has recently been exposed very clearly by Dr. F. W. ASTON <sup>2</sup> from the point of view of the materialistic physicist. He points out that if a cubic decimetre of lead is cut into four equal parts and one of these into four again and so on, the twenty-ninth division would result in something different from lead because it would cut through a molecule. He illustrates also the vast numbers with which one is dealing ; take a tumblerful of water and mark all the molecules in it, pour it out, wait till all the water in earth, sea, and sky is again uniformly mixed, draw the tumbler full again from the nearest tap, and you are likely to find about 2000 of the marked molecules in it. But even numbers of this order will supply no rational basis for the retention of any of the original potency after the 60 successive centesimal dilutions admitted by HAHNEMANN, still less after the 100 practised by some of his followers. Starting with a 1 per cent. solution of aconitine, it is extremely unlikely that a single molecule would be found in any random sample of ten cubic centimetres of the thirteenth dilution ; after 20 dilutions either there would be no aconite in a dose or the current views of physicists are all wrong. The argument presumably is that the views are wrong.

It is possible, too that HAHNEMANN was right in thinking that the self-regenerative capacity which we look upon characteristic of life is far more widely spread. Indeed, suggestions of some such possibility have lately come from those who believe that the Twort-d'Herelle phenomenon is due to a ferment rather than a living organism. Who can tell? Meanwhile, with good nursing, patients go on getting well.

<sup>1</sup> London : Homœopathic Publishing Co. 1s.

<sup>2</sup> Nature, Nov. 25th, 1922. See also A. W. Stewart : Some Physico-chemical Themes, Longmans, 1922, Chapter XII.